f380

A

PLAIN DISCOURSE

ON THE

TRUTH

OF THE

Chriſtian Religion

Conſidered from a Connexion of

PROBABILITIES.

LONDON,
Printed by JAMES BETTENHAM,
MDCCLII.

BRITISH MUSEUM

To the READER.

THIS Diſcourſe was formerly publiſhed in Three Papers, in the Weekly Miſcellany; but a well diſpoſed Gentleman in the Iſle of Wight *having conſidered, that it might be made more extenſively ſerviceable to the Publick, among the lower People, thought proper to reprint it for the uſe of the two Societies for propagating the Goſpel, and promoting Chriſtian Knowledge; and to them he has given almoſt all the Copies. He was pleaſed with the Performance himſelf, and he thought there might be many others to whom it would be acceptable, and therefore he was willing to hope, that the republiſhing of it might do ſome good. And this he believes will be a ſufficient Excuſe for him, as he could have no other end to gain by it, than that it might be ſubſervient to the Cauſe of Religion and Virtue; and if it ſhould he will think himſelf amply rewarded for his Expence and Trouble.*

A

PLAIN DISCOURSE

On the TRUTH of the

Chriſtian Religion &c.

ADMIRABLE Diſcourſes and learned Diſſertations have been publiſh'd in Defence of our Faith; but, by I know not what wrong Policy, or thro' an idle Fear, that we ſhould infuſe *Difficulties* in People's Heads, which would otherwiſe never have diſturb'd them, the middle Sort of Mankind have been left too much neglected, and, as we have ſeen by fatal Experience, too much expos'd to the Attack of the Enemy. Nor is it at all ſtrange, that thoſe who never knew why they were *Believers*, ſhould, on very eaſy Terms, become *Unbelievers*. This Reflection may indeed tend to abate the Pride of their Perverters, but it no way leſſens their own Danger, or the ill Influence ſuch wicked Principles muſt have on the Peace and Happineſs of Mankind. Biſhop *Burnet* fixes the Æra of Infidelity, both in *England* and *Scotland*, about the Time

of the Civil Wars; and, I think he pitches upon Lord *Herb—t* of *C—b—y* as the firſt Man of Conſequence that appear'd on that Side of the Queſtion. I have been inform'd, that on his Death-bed he was very deſirous of receiving the Sacrament from the Hands of an eminent Divine, who had the honeſt Courage to refuſe him his Requeſt, unleſs he would recant the Books he had wrote in Prejudice of Religion. But that was a Sacrifice too great to be made by an Heart ſo full of Pride and Vanity. He could not conſent *thus* Halt and *thus* Maim'd to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven; and perhaps it is eaſier for ſome Men to ſlay their real Children, than to deſtroy thoſe Offſprings of their Wit, which with more than *Motherly* Tenderneſs they have nurs'd up as the Darling of their Soul. The fond Obſtinacy however of this noble Perſon, produc'd one good Effect: It put the eminent Divine, his Friend, upon conſidering how to ſpread an Antidote as wide as his Poiſon, and upon ſupplying thoſe Readers (who were not capable of purſuing the ſtricter Methods of Reaſoning) with ſuch a ſeries of moral Probability, ſtrong in themſelves, and many in Number, as might be an immoveable Baſis for their future Belief, tho' they might not be able to unravel every Difficulty, with which ingenious Men can perplex this or any other Argument. How well he has ſucceeded muſt be left to the World to judge; but I am not apprehenſive that I need aſk any Favour in his Behalf, un-

leſs it be ſome Allowance for the Peculiarities of his Style, which eighty Years ago perhaps wanted no Excuſe. The Title of the Piece, which this Preface introduces was as follows:

An Inſtance of moral Demonſtration, or a Connexion of Probabilities, proving that the Religion of Jeſus Chriſt is from God.

" This Diſcourſe of all the Diſputables in the World, ſhall require the feweſt Things to be granted; even nothing but what was evident, even nothing but the very Subject of the Queſtion, *viz.* That there was ſuch a Man as *Jeſus Chriſt*, that he pretended ſuch Things, and taught ſuch Doctrines: For he that will prove theſe Things to be from God, muſt be allow'd that they were from ſomething or other. But this Poſtulate I do not aſk for Need, but for Order's ſake and Art; for what the Hiſtories of that Age report as a publick affair, as one of the moſt eminent Tranſactions of the World, that which made ſo much Noiſe, which cauſed ſo many Changes, which occaſion'd ſo many Wars, which divided ſo many Hearts, which alter'd ſo many Families, which procur'd ſo many Deaths, which obtain'd ſo many Laws in Favour, and ſuffered ſo many Reſcripts in the Diſfavour of itſelf; that which was not done in a Corner, but was thirty-three Years and more in acting; which cauſed ſo many Sects, and was oppoſed by ſo much Art and ſo much Power, that it might not grow, which fill'd the World with Noiſe, which af-

fected ſuch great Changes in the Bodies of Men by curing the Diſeaſed, and ſmiting the Contumacious or the Hypocrites, which drew ſo many Eyes, and fill'd ſo many Tongues, and employ'd ſo many Pens, and was the *Care* and the *Queſtion* of the whole World at that time, and immediately after; that which was conſign'd by publick Acts and Records of Courts, which was in the Books of Friends and Enemies, which came accompanied and remarked with Eclipſes and Stars, and Prodigies of Heaven and Earth, that which the *Jews* even in Spite, and againſt their Wills, confeſs'd, and which the witty Adverſaries intending to overthrow, could never ſo much as challenge of want of Truth in the Matter of Fact and Story; that which they, who are infinitely concerned that it ſhould not be believ'd, or more that it had never been, do yet only labour to make it to appear not to have been Divine: Certainly this Thing is ſo certain that it was, that the Defenders of it need not account it a Kindneſs to have it preſuppos'd; for never was any Story in the World, that had ſo many Degrees of Credibility, as the Story of the Perſon, Life and Death of *Jeſus Chriſt*: And, if he had not been a true Prophet, yet that he was in the World, and ſaid and did ſuch Things, cannot be deny'd: For even concerning *Mahomet*, we make no Queſtion but he was in the World, and led a great Part of Mankind after him, and what was leſs prov'd we infinitely believe; and what all Men ſay,

and no Man denies, and was notorious in itſelf, of this we may make farther Enquiries, whether it was all that which it *pretended*; for that it did make *Pretences*, and was in the World, needs no more Probation.

But now, whether *Jeſus Chriſt* was ſent from God, we are to take Accounts from all the Things which were *in* him, *about* him, or *from* him. Conſider firſt his Perſon: He was foretold by all the Prophets, as appears by the Correſpondencies of their Sayings to his Perſon: He was deſcrib'd by infallible Characters, which fitted him, and him only, at leaſt *all* of them cannot be brought to concentre in any other Perſon. He was born in the *Fullneſs of Time*, for the *Meſſiah* was expected at the Time when *Jeſus* did appear. Hence the Godly then waited for him, and hop'd to live till the Time of his Revelation; and they did ſo, and with a Spirit of Prophecy, which their own Nation confeſs'd, glorified God at the Revelation. The Expectations of him at *that* Time was ſo publick, that it gave Occaſion to divers Impoſtors to abuſe the Credulity of the People in pretending to be the *Meſſiah*. At his Birth a ſtrange Star appear'd, which guided the wiſe *Chaldees* to worſhip him with Gifts. And this Star was no Secret, it troubled all the Country, it put *Herod* upon ſtrange Arts of Security, and effected a ſad Tragedy accidentally; for it occaſion'd the Death of all the Babes in and about *Bethlehem*. This is that *Jeſus*, at whoſe Preſence, before he was born,

a Babe in his Mother's Womb did leap for Joy, who was alſo a Perſon extraordinary himſelf, conceiv'd in his Mother's old Age, after a long Barrenneſs, ſignified by an Angel in the Temple to his Father, who was ſtruck Dumb for not believing it: This all the People ſaw, and his Kindred were Witneſſes of his Reſtitution. The Child was nam'd by an Angel, and declar'd to be the Forerunner of *Jeſus*, as was foretold by one of the old Prophets. For the whole Story of the *Meſſiah* is a Chain of Providence and Wonder, every Link of which is a Verification of a Prophecy, and all of it is *that Thing*, which from *Adam* to the Birth of *Jeſus* was pointed at by all the Prophets, whoſe Words in him paſs'd perfectly into the Event. He was learned without a Maſter, a Man without Age, diſputing in the Sanctuary at twelve Years old. He was a Sojourner in *Egypt*, becauſe the poor Infant of an indigent Mother, was a formidable Rival to a potent King; which Fear could ariſe from nothing but the Prophecies of this Child, the Sayings of the Learned, the Journey of the Wiſe-men, and the Decrees of God. This bleſſed Perſon made thus excellent, was yet pleas'd for thirty Years together, to live an humble, laborious, and obſcure Life, and then his Perſon was wholly admirable; for he was uſher'd into the World by the Voice of a loud Crier in the Wilderneſs, a Perſon auſtere and Wiſe, of a ſtrange Life, full of Holineſs, and a great Preacher of Righteouſneſs, a Man

believ'd

believ'd by all the People that he came from God, who, on that Account, gather'd Diſciples publickly, and baptiz'd all the Country, yet this Man ſo great, ſo rever'd, ſo follow'd, ſo liſten'd to by King and People, pointed out *Jeſus* to the People, telling them that he muſt increaſe, and himſelf from all that Fame retire to give him Place. When he receiv'd him to Baptiſm, God declar'd by a Voice from Heaven, that he was his Son. This Voice was a known and accepted way of divine Revelation under the Second Temple, it being the Teſtimony by which God made all Extraordinaries to be credible to his People from the Days of *Ezra* to the Death of that Nation; and that there was ſuch a Voice then, and divers times after, was as evident as Things of that Nature can ordinarily be made. For if the Report of honeſt and juſt Men, ſo reputed, may not be accounted ſufficient to make Faith, where there is no Pretence of Men to the contrary, there could be no Story tranſmitted to us, no Records kept, no Acts of Court, no Narratives of the Days of old, no Traditions of our Fathers, in ſhort no Inſtrument left in Nature, whereby God could, after the manner of Men, declare his Will to us. He muſt not only tell it *once*, but *always*; and not only *always to ſome Men*, but *always to all Men*; and then, as there would be no Uſe of Hiſtory, Faithfulneſs, or Honeſty among Men, ſo there would be a perpetual Neceſſity of Miracles from God.

I need not ſpeak of the vaſt Number of Miracles which he wrought; Miracles which were not more Demonſtrations of his Power, than of his Mercy; for they had nothing of Pompouſneſs and Oſtentation, but infinitely of Charity and Mercy, and that *permanent* and *laſting*, and *often;* he open'd the Eyes of the Blind, he made the Crooked Strait, he made the Weak Strong, he cured Fevers with the Touch of his Hand, and an Iſſue of Blood with the Hem of his Garment, and Sore Eyes with the Spittle of his Mouth and the Clay of the Earth; he multiply'd the Loaves and Fiſhes, he raiſed the Dead to Life, a young Maiden, the Widow's Son of *Nain*, and *Lazarus*, and caſt out Devils by the Word of his Mouth, which he could never do but by the Power of God. For Satan does not caſt out Satan, nor a Houſe fight againſt itſelf, if it means to ſtand long; and yet the Devil confeſſes himſelf conquer'd by *Jeſus*, and tormented, as the Oracle did to *Auguſtus Cæſar*, and the Devil to *Jeſus* himſelf; and we read that *Porphyrius*, an Heathen, a profeſſed Enemy to Chriſtianity, did ſay, that ſince *Jeſus* was worſhipped, the Gods could help no Man, that is, the Gods which they worſhipped; the poor baffled, enervated Dæmons.

But beſides, that God gave Teſtimony from Heaven concerning him, he alſo gave this Teſtimony of himſelf, becauſe that *he did God's Will*; for he that lives a Life innocent and ſimple, prudent and wiſe, holy and unſuſpected,

ſuſpected, he is certainly by all wiſe Men ſaid, in a good *Senſe*, to be the Son of God; but he who does well, and ſpeaks well, and calls all Men to glorify God, and ſerves no other Ends, but of Wiſdom of Hearts and Reformation of Manners, that Man carries great Authority in his Sayings, and ought to prevail with good Men in good Things for good Ends, which is all that is here requir'd. But his Nature was ſo ſweet, his Manners ſo humble, his Words ſo wiſe, his Comportment ſo grave and winning, his Anſwers ſo ſeaſonable, his Queſtions ſo deep, his Reproof ſo ſevere and charitable, his Pity ſo great, his Preaching ſo full of Reaſon and Holineſs, of Weight and Authority, his Converſation ſo holy and beneficent, his Poverty great, but his Alms frequent, his Meekneſs ſo incomparable, his Paſſions without Difference, ſave only where Zeal or Pity carried him on to worthy or apt Expreſſions; a Perſon, who deſpiſed none that came to him for Relief; and as for thoſe that did not he went to them; who ſpent his Days in Preaching and Healing, and his Nights in Prayer; who was obedient to Laws, and ſubject to Princes, though he was the Prince of *Judæa* in Right of his Mother, and of all the World in Right of his Father.——The People followed him, but he made no Conventions; and when they were made, he ſuffer'd no Tumults; when they would have made him a King, he withdrew himſelf; when he knew they would have put him to Death, he offer'd himſelf;

he

he would rather work a Miracle than give Offence, and yet ſuffer every Offence, rather than ſee God diſhonour'd; he exactly *kept* the Law of *Moſes*, to which he came to put a *Period*, and yet choſe to ſignify his Purpoſe only by doing Acts of Mercy on their Sabbath, a Charity which themſelves would do to Beaſts, and yet were angry at him for doing it to their Brethren; and, when, by the Greatneſs of his Worth, and the Severity of his Doctrine, by the Charity of his Miracles, and the Noiſes of the People, by his immenſe Fame in all that Part of the World, and the Multitude of his Diſciples, by his free Reproof of their Hypocriſy, and his Diſcovery of their falſe Doctrines and weak Traditions he had branded the Reputation of the vicious Rulers of the People, and *they* reſolv'd to put him to Death; they who had the biggeſt Malice, were forced to ſupply their want of Articles againſt him by making Truth to be his Fault, his Office to be his Crime, and his open Confeſſion of what was aſked him to be his Condemnation: and yet after all this, they could not perſuade the competent Judge to condemn him, therefore they were forc'd to threaten him with *Cæſar*'s Name, againſt whom they would pretend him to be an Enemy, tho' in their Charge they neither prov'd, nor indeed laid it againſt him; and yet to whatſoever they objected he made no Return, but his Silence and his Innocence were remarkable and evident without Labour or Reply, and needed no more Argument,

than

than the Sun needs an Advocate to prove, that he is the brighteſt Star in the Firmament.

Well, ſo it was, they crucified him, and when with an incomparable Sweetneſs and exemplary Patience he endur'd Affronts, Inſolencies, cruel Whippings, and the moſt injurious Uſage from thoſe he had oblig'd by all Endearments, at laſt he went to Death as to the Work which God appointed him, that he might become the World's Sacrifice, and the great Inſtance of repreſenting by what way the World was to be made happy, (even by Sufferings, and ſo entring into Heaven) that he might become the Saviour of his Enemies, the Elder Brother of his Friends, and the Lord of Glory. Then it was that God gave new Teſtimonies from Heaven; the Sun was eclipſed all the while he was upon the Croſs, and yet the Moon was in the *Full.* The Rocks did rend, the Veil of the Temple open'd the Incloſures, and made it pervious to the Gentiles Eye, the Dead aroſe and appear'd in *Jeruſalem* to their Friends, the Centurion and divers of the People ſmote their Hearts, and were by theſe ſtrange Indications convinced that he was the Son of God. His Garments were parted, and Lots caſt upon his inward Coat; they gave him Vinegar and Gall to drink; they brake not a Bone of him, but they pierced his Side with a Spear, looking upon him whom they had pierced, according to the Prophecies of him, which were ſo clear and deſcended to Minutes and Circumſtances of his Paſſion, that there was nothing

thing left by which they could doubt whether this were he or no who was to come into the World: But after all this, that all might be finally verified, and no Scruple left, after three Days Burial, a great Stone being roll'd to the Face of the Grave, and the Stone Seal'd, and a Guard of Soldiers placed about it, he aroſe from the Grave, and for forty Days together converſed with his Followers and Diſciples, and beyond all Suſpicion was ſeen of five hundred Brethren at once, which is a Number too great to give their Conſent and Teſtimony to a Lye, and it being ſo publickly and confidently affirmed at the very Time it was done, and for ever after urg'd by all Chriſtians, uſed as the moſt mighty Demonſtration, proclaimed, preached, talked of, even upbraided to the Gainſayers, affirmed by Eye-Witneſſes, perſuaded to the Kindred and Friends, and the Relatives and Companions of all thoſe five hundred Perſons who were Eye-Witneſſes, it is infinitely removed from a reaſonable Suſpicion; and at the End of thoſe Days was taken up into Heaven in the Sight of many of them, as *Elias* was in the Preſence of *Eliſha*.

Now He, of whom all theſe Things are true, muſt needs be more than a mere Man, and that they were true, was affirm'd by very many Eye-Witneſſes; Men who were innocent, plain Men; Men that had no bad Ends to ſerve; Men that look'd for no Preferment by the Thing in this Life; Men to whom their Maſter told they were to expect not Crowns

and

and Scepters, not Praiſe of Men, or wealthy Poſſeſſions, not Power and Eaſe, but a voluntary caſting away Care and Attendance upon Secular Affairs, that they might attend their Miniſtry, Poverty, and Priſons, Trouble and Vexation, Perſecution and Labour, Whippings and Baniſhment, Bonds and Death; and for a Reward they muſt ſtay till a good Day came, but that was not to be at all in this World, and when the Day of Reſtitution and Recompence ſhould come, they ſhould never know till it came; but upon the Hope of this, and the Faith of Jeſus and the Word of God, ſo taught, ſo conſign'd, they muſt rely wholly and for ever. Now let it be conſider'd, how could Matters of Fact be prov'd better; and how could this be any thing but a Reliance upon Matters of Fact? What greater Certainty can we have of any thing that was ever done, which we ſaw not or heard not, but by the Report of wiſe and honeſt Perſons, eſpecially ſince they were ſuch, whoſe Life and Breeding were ſo far from Ambition and Pompouſneſs, that, as they could not naturally and reaſonably hope for any great Number of Proſelytes, ſo the Fame, that could be hop'd for amongſt them, as it muſt be a Matter of their own procuring, and conſequently uncertain, ſo it muſt needs be very inconſiderable, not fit to outweigh the Danger and the Loſs, nor yet at all valuable by them, whoſe Education and Pretences wereagainſt it? Theſe we have plentifully. But if theſe Men are numerous

and

and united, it is more. Then we have more; for ſo many did affirm theſe Things which they ſaw and heard, that Thouſands of People were convinc'd of the Truth of them: But then, if theſe Men offer their Oath, it is yet more; but yet not ſo much as we have; for they ſealed thoſe Things with their Blood, they gave their Life for a Teſtimony; and what Reward can any Man expect, if he gives his Life for a Lye? who ſhall make him Recompence? or what can tempt him to do it knowingly? But after all, it is to be remembred, that as God hates Lying, ſo he hates Incredulity. As we muſt not believe a Lye, ſo neither ſtop up our Eyes and Ears againſt Truth? and what we do every Minute of our Lives in Matters of little and of great Concernment, if we refuſe to do in our Religion, which yet is to be conducted as other human Affairs are, by human Inſtruments and Arguments of Perſuaſion proper to the Nature of the Thing, it is an Obſtinacy that is as contrary to human Reaſon as it is to divine Faith.

Theſe Things relate to the Perſon of the holy Jeſus, and prove ſufficiently that it was extraordinary, that it was divine, that God was in him, that his Power wrought in him; and therefore that it was his Will which Jeſus taught, and God ſigned. But then, if nothing of all this had been, yet even the Doctrine itſelf proves itſelf divine, and to come from God.

For it is a Doctrine perfective of Nature, that teaches us to love God, and to love one another,

another, to hurt no Man, and to do Good to every Man; it propines to us the nobleſt, the higheſt, and the braveſt Pleaſures of the World; the Joys of Charity, the Reſt of Innocence, the Peace of quiet Spirits, the Wealth of Beneficence, and forbids us only to be Beaſts and Devils; it allows all that God and Nature intended, and only reſtrains the Excreſcencies of Nature, and forbids us to take Pleaſure in that which is the only Entertainment of Devils, in Murders and Revenges, Malice and ſpiteful Words and Actions; it permits corporal Pleaſures, where they can beſt miniſter to Health and Societies, to Converſation of Families, and Honour of Communities; it teaches Men to keep their Words that themſelves may be ſecured in all their juſt Intereſts, and to do Good to others, that Good may be done to them; it forbids biting one another; that we may not be devoured by one another; and commands Obedience to Superiors, that we may not be ruin'd in Confuſions; it combines Governments, and confirms all good Laws, and makes Peace, and oppoſes and prevents Wars, where they are not juſt, and where they are not neceſſary; it is a Religion that is Life and Spirit, not conſiſting in Ceremonies and external Amuſements, but in the Services of the Heart, and the real Fruit of Lips and Hands, that is, of good Words and good Deeds, it bids us to do that to God which is agreeable to his Excellencies, that is, worſhip him with the beſt Thing we have, and make all Things elſe

miniſter

miniſter to it; it bids us do that to our Neighbour, by which he may be better; it is the Perfection of the natural Law, and agreeable to our natural Neceſſities, and promotes our natural Ends and Deſigns; it does not deſtroy Reaſon, but inſtructs it in very many Things, and complies with it in all, it hath in it both Heat and Light, and is not more effectual than it is beauteous; it promiſes every thing that we can deſire, and yet promiſes nothing but what it does effect; it proclaims War againſt all Vices, and generally does command every Virtue; it teaches us with Eaſe to mortify thoſe Affections which Reaſon does ſcarce reprove, becauſe ſhe hath not Strength enough to conquer; and it does create in us thoſe Virtues, which Reaſon *of herſelf* never knew, and after they are known, could never approve *ſufficiently*: it is a Doctrine, in which nothing is ſuperfluous or burdenſome, nor yet is there any thing wanting which can procure Happineſs to Mankind, or by which God can be glorified: and if Wiſdom, and Mercy, and Juſtice, and Simplicity, and Holineſs, and Purity, and Meekneſs, and Contentedneſs, and Charity, be Images of God, and Rays of Divinity, then that Doctrine in which all theſe ſhine ſo glorioufly, and in which nothing elſe is ingredient, muſt needs be from God; and that all this is true in the Doctrine of Jeſus, needs no Proof but the reading the Words.

For that the Words of Jeſus are contained in the Goſpels, that is, in the Writings of them, who

who were Eye-Witneſſes, and Ear-Witneſſes of the Actions and Sermons of Jeſus, is not at all to be doubted; for in every Sect we believe their own Records of Doctrine and Inſtitution; for it is Madneſs to ſuppoſe the Chriſtians to pretend to be Servants of the Laws of Jeſus, and yet to make a Law of their own, which he made not: No Man doubts but that the Alcoran is the Law of *Mahomet*, that the Old Teſtament contains the Religion of the *Jews*; and the Authority of theſe Books is proved by all the Arguments of the Religion; for all the Arguments perſuading to the Religion are intended to prove no other than is contained in thoſe Books; and theſe being for fifteen hundred Years and more received abſolutely by all Chriſtian Aſſemblies, if any Man ſhall offer to make a Queſtion of their Authority, he muſt declare his Reaſons; for the Diſciples of the Religion have ſufficient Preſumption, Security and Poſſeſſion, till they can be reaſonably diſturbed; but that now they can never be, is infinitely certain, becauſe we have a long, immemorial, univerſal Tradition, that theſe Books were written in thoſe Times, by thoſe Men whoſe Names they bear; they were accepted by all Churches at the very firſt Notice; they were acknowledged by the ſame, and by the next Age for genuine, their Authority publiſh'd, their Words cited, Appeals made to them in all Queſtions of Religion, becauſe it was known and confeſſed that they wrote nothing, but that they knew,

ſo that they were not deceiv'd, and to ſay they would lye, muſt be made to appear by ſomething extrinſecal to this Enquiry, and was never ſo much as plauſibly pretended by any Adverſaries, and it being a Matter of another Man's Will, muſt be declared by Actions, or not at all. But beſides, the Men that wrote them were to be believed, becauſe they did Miracles, they wrote Prophecies, which are verified by the Event, Perſons were cur'd at their Sepulchres, a Thing ſo famous, that it was confeſſed even by the Enemies of the Religion, and after all that which the World ought to rely upon, is the Wiſdom, and the Providence, and the Goodneſs of God, all which is concern'd to take care that the Religion, which himſelf ſo adorned and proved by Miracles and mighty Signs, ſhould not be loſt, nor any falſe Writing be obtruded inſtead of true, leſt, without our Fault, the Will of God become impoſſible to be obeyed: But to return to the Thing, all thoſe excellent Things which ſingly did make famous ſo many Sects of Philoſophers, and remarked ſo many Princes of their Sects; all them united, and many more, which their Eyes, dark and dim, could not ſee, are heaped together in the Syſtem of Wiſdom and Holineſs. To conclude, it is ſuch a Law, that nothing can hinder Men to receive and entertain, but a pertinacious Baſeneſs and Love to Vice, and none can receive it but thoſe who reſolve to be good and excellent; and if

the

the holy Jeſus had come into the World with leſs Splendor of Power and mighty Demonſtrations, yet even the Excellency of what he taught makes *him alone fit* to be the Maſter of the World.

But then let us conſider what this excellent Perſon did effect, and with what Inſtruments he brought ſo great Things to paſs. He was to put a Period to the Rites of *Moſes*, and the Religion of the Temple, of which the *Jews* were zealous even unto Pertinacy, to reform the Manners of all Mankind, to confound the Wiſdom of the *Greeks*, to break in Pieces the Power of the Devil, to deſtroy the Worſhip of all falſe Gods, to pull down their Oracles, and change their Laws, and, by Principles wiſe and holy to reform the falſe Diſcourſes of the World. But ſee what was to be taught, a Trinity in the Unity of the Godhead, that is the Chriſtian Arithmetick; a *Man God*, and a *God Man*, the ſame Perſon finite and infinite; born in Time, and yet from all Eternity; the Son of God, but yet born of a Woman, and ſhe a Maid, but yet a Mother; Reſurrection of the Dead, Re-union of the Soul and Body; this was Part of the Chriſtian Phyſicks, or their natural Philoſophy; but then certainly their Moral was eaſy and delicious. It is ſo indeed; but not to *Fleſh and Blood*, whoſe Appetites it pretends to regulate or to deſtroy, to reſtrain, or elſe to mortify. *Faſting*, and *Penance*,

nd *Humility*, *Loving our Enemies*, *Reſtitution of Injuries*, and *Self-denial*, and *Taking up the Croſs*, and *Loſing all our Goods*, and *Giving our Life for Jeſus*: as the other was hard to *believe*, ſo this is hard to *do*; but for whom, and under whoſe Conduct was all this to be believ'd, and all this to be done, and all this to be ſuffer'd? ſurely for ſome glorious and mighty Prince, whoſe Splendor as far out-ſhines the *Roman* Empire, as the Jewels of *Cleopatra* out-ſhined the ſwadling Cloaths of the Babe at *Bethlehem*: No, it was not ſo neither; for all this was for *Jeſus*, whom his Followers preached; a poor Babe, born in a Stable, the Son of a Carpenter, cradled in a Cratch, ſwadled in poor Clouts; it was for him whom they indeed called a God, but yet whom all the World knew, and they themſelves ſaid, was whip'd at a Poſt, nail'd to a Croſs; he fell under the Malice of the *Jews* his Country-men, and the Power of his *Roman* Lords, a cheap and a pitiful Sacrifice, without Beauty and without Splendor. The Deſign is *great*, but yet does not ſeem *poſſible*; but therefore let us ſee what Inſtruments the holy Jeſus choſe to effect theſe ſo mighty Changes, to perſuade ſo many Propoſitions, to endear to great ſufferings, to overcome ſo great Enemies, to maſter ſo many Impoſſibilities, which *this* Doctrine, and *this* Law, from *this* Maſter, were ſure to meet with.

Here,

Here, here it is, the Divinity of the Power is proclaimed; when a *Man* goes to War, he raiſes as great an Army as he can, to out-number his Enemy; but when *God* fights, three hundred Men that lap like a Dog, are ſufficient; nay, one Word can diſſolve the greateſt Army. He that means to effect any Thing, muſt have Means of his own proportionable; and, if they be not, he muſt fail, or derive them from the Mighty. See then with what Inſtruments the holy Jeſus ſets upon this great Reformation of the World. Twelve Men of obſcure and poor Birth, of contemptible Trades and Quality, without Learning, without Breeding, *theſe* Men were ſent into the Midſt of a knowing and wiſe World, to diſpute with the moſt famous Philoſophers of *Greece*, to out-wit all the Learning of *Athens*, to out-preach all the *Roman* Orators, to introduce into a ſettled Empire, which would be impatient of Novelties and Change, ſuch a Change as muſt deſtroy all their Temples, or remove thence all their Gods; againſt which Change, all the Zeal of the World, and all the Paſſions, and all the ſeeming Pretences which they could make, muſt needs be violently oppoſed; a Change that introduced new Laws, and caus'd them to reverſe the old, to change that Religion, under which their Fathers long did proſper, and under which the *Roman* Empire obtain'd ſo great a Grandeur, for a Religion,

which in Appearance was ſilly and humble, meek and peaceable, not apt indeed to do Harm, but expoſing Men to all the Harm in the World, abating their Courage, blunting their Swords, teaching Peace and Unactiveneſs, and making the Soldiers Arms in a Manner uſeleſs, and untying their military Girdle; a Religion which contradicted their Reaſons of State, and erected new Judicatories, and made the *Roman* Courts to be ſilent, and without Cauſes; a Religion which gave Countenance to the Poor and Pitiful (but in a Time when Riches were adored, and Ambition eſteemed the greateſt Nobleneſs, and Pleaſure thought to be the chiefeſt Good) it brought no peculiar Bleſſings to the Rich or Mighty, unleſs they would become poor and humble in ſome real Senſe or other; a Religion that would change the Face of Things, and would alſo pierce into the Secrets of the Soul, and unravel all the Intrigues of Hearts, and reform all evil Manners, and break vile Habits into Gentleneſs and Counſel. That *ſuch* a Religion, in *ſuch* a Time, preach'd by ſuch mean Perſons, ſhould triumph over the Philoſophy of the World, and the Arguments of the Subtle, and the Sermons of the Eloquent, and the Power of Princes, and the Intereſt of States, and the Inclinations of Nature, and the Blindneſs of Zeal, and the Force of Cuſtom, and the Pleaſures of Sin, and the buſy Arts of the Devil, *i. e.* againſt Wit, and Power, and Money,

Money, and Religion, and Wilfulneſs, and Fame, and Empire, which are *all* the Things in the World that can make a Thing *impoſſible*. This, I ſay, could not be by the proper Force of ſuch Inſtruments; for no Man can ſpan Heaven with an Infant's Palm, nor govern wiſe Empires with Diagrams.

It were Impudence to ſend a Footman to command *Cæſar* to lay down his Arms, and diſband his Legions, but if a ſober Man ſhould ſtand alone unprovided, and tell, that he will make the Sun ſtand ſtill, or remove a Mountain, he that believes he *can* and *will* do this, muſt believe he does it by an higher Power than he can yet perceive, and ſo it was in the preſent Tranſaction. For that the holy Jeſus made inviſible Powers do him viſible Honours, that his Apoſtles hunted the Dæmons from their Tripods, their Navels, their Dens and hollow Pipes, their Temples and their Altars; that he made their Oracles ſilent, as *Lucian*, *Porphyry*, *Celſus*, and other Heathens confeſs; that againſt the Order of *new* Things, which, let them be never ſo good, do yet ſuffer Reproach, and cannot prevail, unleſs they commence in a Time of Advantage and Favour, yet that this ſhould flouriſh, like the Palm, by Preſſure, grow glorious by Oppoſition, thrive by Perſecution, and be demonſtrated by Objections, argues an higher Cauſe than the immediate Inſtrument. Now how this higher Cauſe did intervene is manifeſt:

The Apoſtles were not *learned*, but the holy Jeſus promiſed he would ſend down *Wiſdom* from above; they had no *Power*, but they ſhould be inveſted with Power from on high; they were *unlearned* and *timorous*, but he would make them *learned* and *confident*, and ſo he did: He promiſed that in a few Days he would ſend the Holy Ghoſt, and ſo he did; after ten Days they felt and ſaw the glorious Emiſſion from Heaven, Lights, of moveable Fire ſitting upon their Heads, and illuminating their Hearts, and the mighty ruſhing Wind inſpir'd them with a Power of ſpeaking diverſe Languages, and *brought to their Remembrances all that Jeſus did and taught*. Hence we juſtly infer the *Inſpiration* both of their Sermons and their Writings. This Thing was ſo publick, that at the firſt Notice of it, three thouſand Souls were converted; for it was certainly a viſible Demonſtration of an inviſible Power, that Perſons, who were never taught, ſhould, in an Inſtant, ſpeak all the Languages of the *Roman* Empire; and indeed this Thing was ſo neceſſary to *be ſo*, and ſo certain that it *was ſo*, that it is not eaſy to ſay whether it was the Indication of a greater Power, or a greater Wiſdom; and now the Means was proportionable enough, to the biggeſt End; without Learning they could not conſute the learned World; but therefore God became their Teacher: Without Power they could not break the Devil's Violence, and there-

therefore God gave them Power: without Courage they could not conteſt againſt all the Violence, of the *Jews* and *Gentiles*; but therefore God was their Strength. Immediately upon this the Apoſtles, to make a Fulneſs of Conviction, gave the Spirit to others alſo, to the *Jews* and *Gentiles*, and *Samaritans*, and they ſpake with Tongues and propheſied; then they preached to all Nations, endured all Perſecutions, cured all Diſeaſes, raiſed the Dead to Life, and were brought before Tribunals, and confeſſed the Name of Jeſus, and convinced the blaſphemous *Jews* out of their own Prophets, and not only prevail'd upon Women and weak Men, but even upon the braveſt and wiſeſt, all the Diſciples of *John the Baptiſt*, *the Nazarens and Ebionites*, *Nicodemus and Joſeph of Arimathea*, *Sergius the Preſident*, *Dionyſius an Athenian Judge*, *and Polycarp*, *Juſtin and Irenæus*, *Athenagoras and Origen*, *Tertullian*, *and Clement of Alexandria*, who could not be ſuch Fools as, upon a Matter *probably falſe*, to unravel their former Principles, to change their Liberty for a Priſon, Wealth for Poverty, Honour for Diſreputation, Life for Death, if for ſuch Exchange they had not been ſecured of Truth, and Holineſs, and the Will of God.

But now it is no new Wonder, but a Purſuance of the ſame Conjugation of great and divine Things, that the Religion of Jeſus was with ſo *incredible Swiftneſs* ſcattered over the Face of all the habitable World,

World, it filled all *Aſia* immediately, it paſſed preſently into *Europe*, and to the fartheſt *Africans*, and all the Way it went, it told nothing but an holy and an humble Story, that He, who came to bring it into the world died an ignominous Death, and yet this Death did not take away their Courage, but added much; for they did not fear Death for that Maſter whom they knew to have for their Sakes ſuffered Death, and came to Life again. But now infinite Numbers of Perſons, of all Sexes, and all Ages, and all Countries, became Converts to this Faith, and he that was crucified in the Reign of *Tiberius*, was in the Time of *Nero*, even in *Rome* itſelf, and in *Nero*'s Family, by many Perſons eſteemed for a God; and it was upon publick Record that he was ſo acknowledged. Yet the Chriſtians were ſought for to Puniſhments, and exquiſite Puniſhments were ſought forth for them; their Goods were confiſcate, their Names odious, Priſons were their Houſes, and ſo many Kinds of Tortures invented for them, that *Domitius Ulpianus* hath ſpent ſeven Books in deſcribing the Variety of Tortures the poor Chriſtian was put to at his firſt Appearance; and yet in deſpite of all this, and ten thouſand other Objections, whatſoever was *for* them made the Religion grow, and whatever was *againſt* them made it grow; if they had Peace the Religion was proſperous; if they had Perſecu-

tion,

tion, it was ſtill proſperous: if Princes favoured them, the World came in becauſe the Chriſtians lived holily; if Princes were incenſed, the World came in becauſe the Chriſtains died bravely. They beheld with Joy the Wheels and bended Trees, the Racks and Gibbets, the Fires and the burning Irons, which were, like the Chair of *Elias*, Inſtruments to carry them to Heaven, into the Boſom of their beloved Jeſus. Could a few Fiſhermen and a Publican effect all this for the Son of a poor Maiden of *Judæa?* Can we ſuppoſe ſo great a Part of Mankind can conſent by *Chance*, or ſuffer ſuch Changes for *Nothing?* or for any Thing leſs than this? the Son of the poor Maiden was the Son of God, and the Fiſhermen ſpake by a divine Spirit; they *catched* the World with Holineſs and Miracles, with Wiſdom and Power bigger than the Strength of all the *Roman* Legions.

But our bleſſed Lord was not only foretold by all the Prophets, but was himſelf a Prophet alſo. While he was alive, he foretold that after his Death his Religion ſhould flouriſh; and yet he foretold Perſecutions to his Diſciples, he predicted the Miſſion of the Holy Ghoſt, and the Deſtruction of *Jeruſalem*, with the Deſigns of its Approach, and that it ſhould be by War, and particularly, after the manner of the Prophets, ſymbolically nam'd the Nation ſhould do it, by pointing out the

Roman

Roman Eagles. He foretold his own Death, and the Manner of it, and plainly beforehand publiſh'd his Reſurrection, and told them it ſhould be the Sign to that Generation, *viz.* the great Argument to prove him to be the Chriſt. He propheſied that there ſhould ariſe falſe Chriſts after him, and it came to paſs, to the extreme great Calamity of the Nation; and laſtly, he foretold that his beloved Diſciple St. *John* ſhould tarry upon the Earth till his coming to Judgment upon *Jeruſalem*, and that his Religion ſhould be received by all Nations, and ſtay upon the Face of the Earth till his laſt coming to judge all the World, and that the Gates of Hell ſhould not be able to prevail againſt his Church; which Prophecy is made good thus long till this Day, and is as a continual Argument to juſtify the Divinity of the Author. The *Continuance* of the Religion helps to *continue* it; for it proves that it came from God, who foretold that it ſhould *continue*, and therefore it muſt *continue*, becauſe it came from God; and therefore it came from God, becauſe it does and ſhall *continue* for ever, according to his Word.

But after our bleſſed Lord was enter'd into Glory, the Spirit of Prophecy ſtill continu'd in his Diſciples; *Agabus* foretold the Dearth that was to be in the *Roman* Empire in the Days of *Claudius Cæſar*, and that St *Paul* ſhould be bound at *Jeruſalem*.

lem. St *Paul* foretold the entring in of Hereſies into *Aſia* after his Departure; and he, and St *Peter*, and St *Jude*, and generally the reſt of the Apoſtles, had two great Predictions, which they uſed not only as a Verification of the Doctrine of Jeſus, but as a Means to ſtrengthen the Hearts of the Diſciples, who were ſo broken with Perſecution: The one was, that there ſhould ariſe a Sect of vile Men, who ſhould be Enemies to Religion and Government, and cauſe a great Apoſtaſy, which happen'd notoriouſly in the Sect of the Gnoſticks, which thoſe three Apoſtles and St *John* manifeſtly and plainly do deſcribe; and the other was, that altho' the *Jewiſh* Nation did mightily oppoſe the Faith, it ſhould be but for a while; for they ſhould be deſtroy'd in a ſhort time, and their Nation made extremely miſerable; but for the Chriſtians, if they would fly from *Jeruſalem*, and go to *Pella*, there ſhould not an Hair of their Head periſh. The Verification of this Prophecy the Chriſtians extremely long'd for, and wonder'd it ſtaid ſo long, and began to be troubled at the Delay, and ſuſpected all was not well, when the great Proof of their Religion was not verified; and while they were in Thoughts of Heart concerning it, the ſad Catalyſis did come, and ſwept away Eleven hundred thouſand of the Nation; and from that Day forward the Nation was broken in Pieces with intolerable

tolerable Calamities; they are ſcatter'd over the Face of the Earth, and are a vagabond Nation, but yet, like Oil in a Veſſel of Wine, broken into Bubbles, but kept in their own Circles, and they ſhall never be an united People, till they are Servants of the Holy Jeſus; but ſhall remain without Prieſt or Temple, without Altar or Sacrifice, without City or Country, without the Land of Promiſe, or the Promiſe of a Bleſſing, till our Jeſus is their High Prieſt, and the Shepherd to gather them into his Fold: And this very Thing is a mighty Demonſtration againſt the *Jews* by their own Prophets; for when *Iſaiah* and *Jeremiah*, and *Malachi* had propheſied the Rejection of the *Jews*, and the Calling of the *Gentiles*, and the Change of the old Law, and the Introduction of a new by the Meſſias; that this was He, was therefore certain, becauſe he taught the World a new Law, and preſently after the Publication of this, the old was abrogate, and not only went into Deſuetude, but into a total Abolition among all the World; and for thoſe of the Remnant of the ſcattered *Jews* who obſtinately blaſpheme, the Law is become impoſſible to them, and they placed in ſuch Circumſtances, that they need not diſpute concerning its Obligation; for it being external and corporal, ritual, and at laſt made alſo local, when the Circumſtances are impoſſible, the Law that was wholly ceremo-

nial and circumſtantial, muſt needs paſs away, and when they have loſt their Prieſthood, they cannot retain the Law.

And it is a Wonder to conſider how the Anger of God is gone out upon that miſerable People, and that ſo great a Blindneſs is fallen upon them, it being evident and notorious, that the Old Teſtament was nothing but a Shadow and Umbrage of the New; that the Prophecies of that are plainly verified in this; that all the Predictions of the Meſſias are moſt undeniably accompliſh'd in the Perſon of Jeſus Chriſt, ſo that they cannot, with any Plauſibleneſs or Colour be turned any other way, and be applied to any other Perſon, although the *Jews* made illiterate Allegations, and prodigious Dreams, by which they have fooled themſelves for ſixteen hundred Years together, and ſtill hope without Reaſon, and are confident without Revelation, and purſue a Shadow while they quit the glorious Body.

Since therefore there is *nothing* to be ſaid for any other Religion, and *ſo very much* for Chriſtianity, every one of whoſe Pretences can be prov'd as well as the Things themſelves do require, and as all the World expects ſuch Things ſhould be prov'd; it follows, that the Holy Jeſus is the Son of God, that his Religion is commanded by God, and is that Way by which he will be worſhipped and honoured, and that

that there is no other Name under Heaven by which we can be saved, but only by the Name of the Lord Jesus. He that puts his Soul upon this, cannot perish; neither can he be reproved, who hath so much Reason and Argument for his Religion. *Sit Anima mea cum Christianis*; I pray God my Soul may be numbred among the Christians.

FINIS.

BRITISH MUSEUM 6 NO 73